

TS-HK 70

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE

October 24, 1969

MEMORANDUM FOR

THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

SUBJECT: North Vietnam Contingency Plan

The President has requested that a contingency plan be prepared for the conduct of a three-day, retaliatory air and naval campaign against North Vietnam. This plan would be in addition to those now in preparation as a result of the President's meeting with you and the Joint Chiefs of Staff on October 11, 1969.

The objective of the attack would be to impose maximum damage against remunerative military and war-supporting targets within a short time in order to demonstrate the ability and willingness of the United States to resume full-scale air and naval operations against North Vietnam. The following additional guidance is provided:

- a. Operations against NVN will be in response to enemy provocation, and will apply the maximum feasible level of effort.
- b. Initial launch of aircraft will be within 72 hours following a Presidential decision.
- c. The plan should emphasize primarily attacks against enemy military targets, including stockpiles in the Haiphong Port area, and secondarily against high value economic targets.
- d. Risk of civilian casualties should be minimized.
- e. Naval surface forces will support the retaliatory attack to the extent feasible.
- f. Mining operations will not be authorized.

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INSTRUCTIONS APPLY

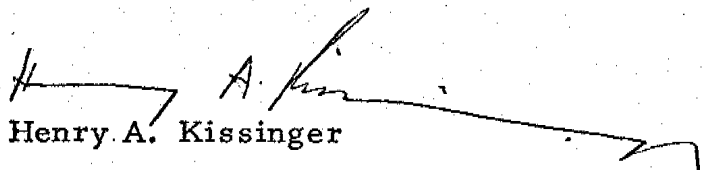
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In addition to the above, it is requested that the President be provided with an estimate of U.S. aircraft losses under two conditions:

- a. Concentrated attack against the enemy air and air defense system, such as envisioned in the PRUNING KNIFE plan.
- b. More limited attacks against the enemy air and air defense targets necessary to provide minimum essential protection to the strike forces.


Henry A. Kissinger

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cc: Howe/Hsig

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

October 28, 1969

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: Henry A. Kissinger *HK*

SUBJECT: Troop Replacements

Attached at Tab A is a report from Ambassador Bunker of his conversations with President Thieu on troop replacements:

Thieu made the following points, inter alia:

--South Vietnamese defense leaders believe that without changing draft laws there are adequate manpower resources to replace about 150,000 US troops next year.

--In order to replace 150,000 US troops, the Vietnamese force strength planned for the end of 1970 would have to be increased to 1,100,000.

--Any new replacements should not be made until March or April 1970.

--Announcing US intentions to pull out the bulk of its combat troops would not have adverse political or morale effects in South Vietnam but the timing of reductions should be kept secret.

--Modern weaponry supplied by the US is essential if the morale and effectiveness of the People's Self Defense Force is to be improved.

Mr. Bunker offered, inter alia, the following preliminary observations:

--We should encourage Thieu to proceed with planning for an expanded strength of 1,100,000.

--Before fixing next year's schedule, we should evaluate enemy plans for increased military effort.

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① Thieu should increase the V. Nam Weapons & Training program - I still think the military is far lagging.

② Ask Bunker to pass a sanitized version of this account through channels to State

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--The announcement of an overall replacement goal of 150,000 might have adverse effects on the morale of our own troops, as well as those of the ARVN.

--If the timing of replacement plans became known, it would give considerable military advantages to the enemy.

--Thieu's approach to troop replacements, economic improvements, and pacification is impressive.

--On many counts the new government is already turning in a more effective performance than its predecessor.

Unless there is a major enemy offensive in the interim, I believe the next replacement increment should be announced in early December before the pressure surrounding December 15 has had a chance to build. The period for accomplishing the next replacement probably should cover a longer time interval and thus encompass a larger withdrawal increment.

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VIA CAS CHANNELS

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FROM: Ambassador Bunker, Saigon 226

TO: Henry A. Kissinger

1. I thought it might be useful for the President, before receiving my overall assessment of the situation here, to have a report on my conversations with Thieu on the subject of troop replacements.

2. In opening the discussion, I referred to his statement in his speech to the National Assembly October 6 that the bulk of American combat forces could be replaced during 1970. I said that I would like to have his appraisal of the effect of present withdrawals, the effectiveness of the equipping and training of the Vietnamese forces, and the rate at which American forces could be replaced.

3. Thieu said that he had instructed Minister of Defense Vy and Chief of JGS General Vien to make a study of manpower resources and requirements in connection with Vietnamization, especially the possibilities for recruitment and training of additional RF and PF personnel, since he felt this to be the critical element in the Vietnamization process. It was essential that the ARVN should achieve greater mobility and become more available for operations against enemy main force units. To the extent, therefore, that ARVN plays a role in local security this should be progressively taken over by the RF/PF and the People's Self-Defense Forces. This was consistent with the 1970 Pacification Program which has emphasized consolidation of what had already been achieved.

4. The conclusions of Generals Vy and Vien are that there are adequate manpower resources to replace about 150,000 U.S. troops next year. This can be done within the present mobilization law, i. e. without reducing the draft age to 17 or raising the upper limit. This favorable picture is the result of a number of factors: A) There are as yet some untapped manpower resources in the religious sects, notably the HOA HAO and CAO DAI, where there has been some draft evasion, but the problem will be less acute if the recruits serve in their home areas. B) The PSDF now provides

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another source of manpower; younger men can be upgraded into the popular and regional forces. C) There is also still some untapped manpower available in the cities.

5. Present plans call for RVNAF strength of 930,000 by the end of 1969. The JCS and MACV have jointly approved a figure of 993,000 for the end of 1970. What the GVN is now proposing for the end of 1970 is a total strength of 1,100,000. Thieu noted that there is not yet a common viewpoint on GVN manpower resources. He feels that the U.S. has consistently underestimated GVN capabilities in this respect. If all these human resources were mobilized, Thieu said, the GVN could handle a reduction of 150,000 troops next year. On the other hand, he said, if the U.S. maintains its present view on expansion of the RVNAF, then the GVN could replace only perhaps 80,000. (I have discussed Thieu's views on expansion with General Abrams and we are agreed that we should cooperate with them in moving toward the higher figure.)

6. Thieu went on to say that while he wanted to start on RF/PF expansion right away, it would take a little time, and, therefore, he felt it would be advisable to make the first replacement, say, not much before March or April 1970 and space subsequent increments perhaps at three month intervals. (The months he mentioned were April, June, August, and November, which are, however, not at three month intervals.)

7. A factor which has to be considered, Thieu said, is the level of combat. Should it remain the same as it has been up to now in 1969, i. e. periods of relative inactivity with high points interspersed, this could be handled adequately; and he felt a general offensive could be handled with present force strength.

8. I brought up the question of alternate methods of troop reductions, whether it was more desirable to continue by increments or announce a larger figure over a longer period. A possible advantage of the latter alternative would be that it might give us more flexibility. Thieu replied that he thought President Nixon could announce an overall goal which would be in line with his own statement that the U.S. could pull out the bulk of its combat troops, but the timing of specific reductions should be kept secret.

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9. In response to my question about the effect of the announcement of such a large scale reduction on the morale of RVNAF and the civilian population, Thieu replied that he thought there would be no problem because they are already aware of his statement that the U.S. could pull out the bulk of its combat troops by 1970. He was, therefore, not concerned about adverse political or morale effects. He added that when people in South Vietnam would know that the South Vietnamese forces were going to be expanded, i. e. that additional RF/PF would be available to "replace" U.S. troops--in other words, that 150,000 more RF/PF would be phased in as the same number of U.S. forces are phased out--they would understand that there would be no "gap" and would, therefore, not be worried. The question of American opinion, of course, is a separate one and would have to be considered by President Nixon, he said.

10. From the point of view of the enemy, Thieu said, there would be no "gap" they could exploit. They are, of course, trying to encourage a more rapid U.S. troop withdrawal precisely because they hope to exploit such a "gap". Thieu said there were two alternative ways to deal with the enemy; (a) through Vietnamization, or (b) "strong action" to bring the enemy to negotiate seriously. In the absence of such strong action, he did not believe the enemy would negotiate seriously.

11. Thieu made these additional points: A) Progressive upgrading of responsibilities of the GVN forces; PSDF will have to take over more responsibility for security within the village; the PF would operate outside the villages; the RF would move out into the districts and elsewhere in the provinces; this would leave the ARVN to engage main force units wherever they may be found. What is essential is to improve the combat efficiency of the PSDF. The job of providing training and leadership is up the GVN, but improved weaponry must come from the U.S. This is important for morale and for effectiveness. We should take a leaf from the book of the VC Guerrilla who is equipped with the most modern weapons. Thieu also recalled that improved weapons had resulted in marked improvement of the RF/PF performance. B) Plans for reorganization of the ARVN: This will provide four or five mobile divisions: The Airborne, Marines, Rangers and one or two infantry divisions. This will be important so that these units could be shifted quickly to wherever they are most needed. C) Enemy intentions: Thieu felt that the enemy

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would attempt to keep up pressure on the cities and urban areas, therefore it was necessary to improve security in these areas as part of the policy of consolidation in 1970. He believes the enemy next year will continue to use guerrilla tactics in the Delta; in III Corps he will remain poised for more direct attacks; in I Corps he would take complementary action by maintaining pressure in the coastal areas, coordinating this with the attacks he may launch in III Corps; and he will maintain his threat in I Corps.

12. While I will have several more comments in my overall assessment, following are some preliminary observations that may be helpful in considering what Thieu has said: A) I think we should encourage and help Thieu to go ahead with his expansion planning (indeed JGS has on Thieu's instructions already initiated talks with MACV looking toward RVNAF expansion in anticipation of a redeployment of 150,000 U.S. troops during 1970). B) I believe there is a serious question whether we should fix any overall schedule for replacements during the next year before we know more about the magnitude of the upcoming enemy effort. He is engaged in extensive improvements of the supply and infiltration routes in the Laos Panhandle in anticipation of the dry season. This could foreshadow a decision on his part for a substantial increase in infiltration with a view to intensifying the level of activity as our troops are withdrawn. This would be consistent with his policy of maintaining for some time a low level of activity to encourage faster withdrawal on our part. C) While I think Thieu is the best judge concerning the political or morale effects on his own people of the announcement of such a large overall goal for replacements in the coming year, I would not place absolute reliance on his expectation that there would be no adverse effects. D) Aside from the question of RVNAF morale, I believe we need to consider the possible effects of such an announcement in the morale of our own troops, especially if there develops a general expectation of a major enemy offensive. Even if no general expectation develops, there is a question of the attitude of those who remain behind. E) I feel that if we were to agree with Thieu on a schedule of reductions for the coming year, but endeavor to keep the timing secret as he has suggested (Paragraph 8), there is a real danger that such a schedule would not remain secret very long; and, of course, if the enemy becomes knowledgeable of our intentions in any detail, this would confer upon him a real military advantage. In other words, I question the desirability, unless it becomes necessary, for other reasons, of departing from

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the "cut and try" method which has been successful to date. F) While I shall have further comment on these and other matters in my overall assessment, I may say that in the talks I have had with Thieu since my return I have been impressed and pleased with the determination and vigor with which he is approaching not only the problem of U.S. troop replacements, but also the economic situation and all of the elements involved in the whole pacification program. On a good many counts, the new government is already turning in a more effective performance than its predecessor.

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